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ABSTRACT

Early childhood professionals and others concerned with the welfare of young children believe that voluntary quality guidelines can provide a model for program developers and current operators to use in assuring that program practices are age appropriate, that trained personnel are available, and that facilities are acceptable. These quality guidelines, which represent a standard of quality exceeding minimum licensing, approval, and accreditation requirements, were prepared for use by most types of public and private early childhood programs--child care centers, family child care homes, early childhood special education programs, preschools, nursery schools, Head Start programs, kindergartens, and primary units. The guidelines have been grouped into seven major categories: Administration, Staffing, the Learning Environment, Health and Safety, Family Involvement and Parenting Education, Use of Community Resources, and Evaluation of Program and Staff. In each category, a statement of ideals and a rationale are followed by indicators that identify characteristics of quality programs. Also provided is a checklist that administrators, teachers, parents, and others can use to determine the extent to which their program meets the guidelines. It is emphasized that the guidelines are not requirements; they only describe a model of program quality. (HTH)

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INDICATORS OF QUALITY

Second Edition

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Guiding the Development and Improvement of Early Childhood Care and Education Programs

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INDICATORS OF QUALITY

Second Edition

Guiding the Development and Improvement of Early Childhood Care and Education Programs

Revised by the Program Recognition Subcommittee
of the Child Care and Early Childhood Education Coordinating Committee

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FOREWORD

Prior to the development of the first edition of Indicators of Quality, voluntary state level guidelines designed to promote quality and excellence in early care and education programs for young children were not available. Believing that it could play a role in remedying this, the State Board of Education, in January of 1988, approved the formation of the Early Childhood Guidelines Task Force. The members who served on the Task Force were individuals from throughout the state representing preschool and child care programs, preschool special education, kindergarten/primary education, Head Start, health and human service agencies, parents, post-secondary education, and school administration.

The Task Force spent more than a year conducting research, reviewing guidelines from other sources, and formulating the original document. It was intended that the voluntary guidelines would serve as a contribution to the field of early childhood care and education in our state. The Task Force described a model that would allow new and existing center-based and school-based early childhood programs to establish goals toward which they could strive to better serve the children and families of Nebraska.

This second edition of Indicators of Quality includes revisions which expand the document to represent additional settings in the field of early childhood care and education. Improving the quality of the early childhood care and education system was identified as one of the goals of the Child Care and Early Childhood Education Coordinating Committee (CCECECC) formed in 1991 as a result of the passage of LB 836. This legislation grew out of the Task Force on Quality, Affordable, and Accessible Child Care convened by Senator Don Wesely and the Health and Human Services Committee of the Legislature. CCECECC formed the Program Recognition Subcommittee consisting of designated CCECECC members, staff representatives from the Nebraska Department of Education and Department of Social Services, and other external members from the early childhood care and education field. In addition to the task of reviewing and revising the guidelines for center-based and school-based programs in Indicators of Quality, this subcommittee was given the charge of developing guidelines for home-based and school-age care programs. A significant outcome was the evolvement of this single document which recognizes that most indicators of quality are the same for all settings; home-based, center-based, school-based early childhood programs and school-age care programs. Some differences exist in materials, staffing, and programming based on settings and ages of children, and the guidelines identify where those differences exist. It is hoped that this document will promote and support the unification of all sectors of the early childhood care and education field in the commitment to high quality programs for children in Nebraska.

The quality of the group settings we provide for young children makes a difference now and for their future. In the words of an old Chinese proverb:

"A child's life is like a piece of paper
on which every passerby leaves a mark."

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INTRODUCTION

The Purpose of Voluntary Guidelines

In striving to meet increasing needs for child care and early childhood services, communities must also strive to provide high quality settings which will assist children in reaching their potential and better prepare them for the world of tomorrow. Programs offered to children during the early and middle childhood period of birth through twelve years should be based on sound, researched principles of child development and staffed by persons optimally prepared to work with children in this age range. Early childhood professionals and others concerned with the welfare of young children believe that voluntary quality guidelines can provide a model for program developers and current operators to use in assuring that program practices are age appropriate, that trained personnel are available, and that facilities are acceptable.

These guidelines were prepared for use by public and private early childhood care and education programs. Child care centers, family child care homes, early childhood special education programs, preschools, nursery schools, Head Start programs, kindergarten/primary classrooms, and school-age care programs will all find them helpful. Requirements of minimum licensure have not been repeated in most instances, since these guidelines are intended to represent a standard of quality which exceeds the minimums.

Voluntary guidelines are not requirements. They are intended to augment minimum regulations such as those required in licensing and in the minimum approval and accreditation requirements for public and private schools; they nurture higher quality than minimum standards. It is not anticipated that all programs will be able to meet each and every guideline. With the diversity of programs in Nebraska, it is challenging to specify guidelines that are universally applicable or acceptable; this document represents the best effort of a diverse group of knowledgeable professionals.

Organization of the Guidelines

The guidelines have been grouped into seven major categories: Administration, Staffing, The Learning Environment, Health and Safety, Family Involvement and Parenting Education, Use of Community Resources, and Evaluation of Program and Staff. Each category begins with an Ideal Statement and Rationale, followed by Indicators that identify specific characteristics of quality programs. A checklist is provided to assist administrators, teachers, parents, and others in determining the extent to which their program meets these guidelines. Again, it is important to remember that these guidelines are not requirements; they are intended only to describe a model of program quality toward which programs can aspire to better serve the children and families of Nebraska. Most quality indicators apply to all types of programs; those which are specific to a particular type of program are identified in the description of the criteria.

Benefits of Using the Guidelines

Programs which aspire to meet these guidelines can benefit children, their families, their communities, and the programs and staff in the following ways:

Benefits for children:

- allowing children to develop at their own rates of learning
- encouraging social interaction
- providing opportunities for decision making and problem solving
- allowing children to learn by doing and applying knowledge
- respecting and encouraging children's natural interests and abilities
- enhancing a positive disposition for learning

Benefits for families:

- providing comfort and assurance that they are choosing a recognized quality program for their children
- fostering positive relationships between parent and child
- serving as a resource for information
- providing healthy alternatives to self-care

Benefits for the community:

- preparing young children to become well adjusted and productive citizens
- offering citizens opportunities to choose identified and recognized quality programs
- promoting interagency collaboration
- providing supportive services to families
- responding to community concerns regarding unsupervised children

Benefits to programs and staff:

- providing a point of reference for program structure and quality
- providing staff a process to facilitate an assessment of current programs
- providing criteria for program and personal growth
- providing staff with quality standards to share with parents

GLOSSARY

Administrator - the person responsible for the on-site, on-going, daily supervision of the program and staff.

Center-based program - a part-day or full-day group child care and early childhood education program; includes any program licensed as a child care center or preschool by the Department of Social Services.

Child care center - a program licensed by the Department of Social Services serving children 12 years of age or younger.

Curriculum - the experiences within the program; includes planned activities, spontaneous activities, interactions, and the environment.

Developmentally appropriate - learning environment and teaching strategies which are based on theories and research about the growth and development of children.

Family child care home - a program licensed by the Department of Social Services which serves up to eight children in a home-based setting.

Field trips and outings - trips where children are taken to areas or events outside of the licensed program space; may require transportation or may be within walking distance.

Home-based program - a program which relies primarily on a home as the site for the provision of child care and early childhood education for children and/or their families; includes any program licensed as a family child care home by the Department of Social Services.

Infant - a child between the ages of birth and 18 months.

Paraprofessional - an assistant who works directly with children under the direction of a program staff person.

Parent/guardian - the adult legally responsible for the child.

Personnel - all support staff in a program, paid or volunteer, including but not limited to cooks, bus drivers, custodians, and office staff.

Preschool - a program licensed by the Department of Social Services which serves children below school age.

Preschool-age child - a child between the ages of 36 months and the age at which the child becomes eligible to attend kindergarten (5 years by October 15).

Program - any program which provides child care and early childhood education for children in child care homes and centers; preschools and nursery schools; Head Start, Even Start, Early Childhood Combination Programs, early childhood special education programs; kindergarten through grade 3 in public and nonpublic schools; and school-age care programs.

School-age child - a child eligible to attend kindergarten who has not reached 13 years of age.

School-age care - child care services for school-age children during the hours before and after the regular school day.

Staff - all teachers/caregivers; includes any individual operator or employee in a program who provides or supervises providers of direct care/education to children.

Toddler - a child between the ages of 18 months and 36 months.

ADMINISTRATION

IDEAL STATEMENT: Administration in a quality program for children is impartial, consistent and carried out in accordance with the purposes, goals, policies, and procedures established by the governing body of the program.

RATIONALE: The success of quality care and education programs for children is dependent upon the leadership of the administration in meeting the needs of the children, parents, and staff. An effective administrator, whether working in a program as the only staff person or supervising a large program with many staff, places high priority on the promotion of developmentally appropriate practices, optimum utilization of human and material resources, sound fiscal planning and budgeting, and collaboration between staff, parents, and community as partners in the education and development of children.

QUALITY INDICATORS	Met	In Process	Not Met	N/A
1. The program meets all applicable state and local standards.				
2. The program is based on a written statement which reflects sound principles of child development.				
3. The statement of goals is shared with the parents/guardians of children enrolled and with all staff, including substitutes and volunteers.				
4. The program has written policies and procedures of operation based on the statement of goals, which include but are not limited to: a. fee schedule (where applicable) b. hours of operation c. holidays/closings d. procedures for dealing with illness e. emergency procedures f. copies of all forms used g. discipline guidelines				
5. The program has written policies and procedures for all personnel based on its statement of goals which include but are not limited to: a. job descriptions b. employment practices c. salary schedules d. description of benefits e. provisions for vacation, illness/personal leave f. grievance procedures g. resignation/termination procedures h. procedures for supervision and evaluation of personnel i. staff development requirements j. provision for orientation of new staff members				

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QUALITY INDICATORS	Met	In Process	Not Met	N/A
6. The program maintains liability insurance coverage.				
7. An annually reviewed and updated parent information guide is provided for the parent/guardian of every child.				
8. Fiscal records are maintained as required by the funding source(s).				
9. A budget for long-range (one year or more) and short-term (month by month) planning is established.				
10. In programs employing more than two staff members, time is allocated regularly within the hours of operation for shared and individual planning by the staff, or staff is paid for planning time outside hours of operation.				
11. In programs with more than two staff members, the program staff meets at least monthly to discuss program plans, to plan for implementing and attaining goals, to plan for individual children, and to discuss program and working conditions.				
12. The program administrator assumes responsibility for supervision of all components of the program (e.g., staff development, staff and program evaluation, parent involvement/parent education, community resource utilization, staff selection and assignment, program development and oversight).				
13. In programs employing more than two staff members, staff members who work six or more hours per day are provided space and break time away from children during the day.				
14. Information about children, families, and associates is kept confidential and is shared only among professionals when appropriate.				

STAFFING

IDEAL STATEMENT: A quality care and education program for children employs and assigns staff who are optimally qualified to assist children in advancing all aspects of their development; social, emotional, intellectual, and physical. Further, the program assures the development of staff through the provision of individual and program-wide inservice.

RATIONALE: One of the most important factors affecting the quality of care and education programs for children is the staff. Personal characteristics, philosophical beliefs, understanding and knowledge of child development, and the ability to apply these in interactions with children are critical considerations in the selection of those who care for and teach young children.

The quality of the relationships between staff and children has a significant influence on a child's learning experience. The attachment formed between them has an impact upon the child's self-esteem, sense of security, ability to explore and be curious, ability to reach out to others, and other aspects of positive development. Therefore, it is critical that the procedures for staff selection include consideration of applicants' personal characteristics as well as appropriate educational preparation and related experience.

A quality program provides for the professional development of all staff, encourages their participation in related professional organizations, and works to promote their ongoing employment in the program. All staff have a continuing need to update their skills. Quality programs for children, as well as the staff, differ in many ways, and methods of improvement will differ from program to program. A strong link exists between staff development and staff and program evaluation. An analysis of a program's strengths and weaknesses provides a basis for improving the quality of the staff.

Quality programs are organized to meet the learning and care needs of children. Lower staff/child ratios and optimum group size have been shown to promote positive outcomes for young children in both the cognitive and interpersonal domains. The size of groups and the number and types of staff assigned are dependent upon the ages of the children and factors such as the arrangement of the physical setting. Programs which integrate children with special needs may require lower staff/child ratios.

QUALITY INDICATORS	Met	In Process	Not Met	N/A
SELECTION OF STAFF				
1. There is a written procedure for the selection of staff which is related to the philosophy of the program.				

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QUALITY INDICATORS	Met	In Process	Not Met	N/A
QUALIFICATIONS OF STAFF				
1. Each staff member has appropriate training based upon the level of responsibility. All staff have at least a high school diploma or GED and experience working with children of ages similar to children in the program.				
a. **If the care and education program employs an administrator**, that person has the following qualifications:				
(1) ***In public or nonpublic schools***, the building administrator has at least 6 semester credit hours in child development/early childhood education.				
(2) ***In a child care center or preschool***, the program director has at least:				
(a) a bachelor level degree from an accredited college or university, or its equivalent, and at least 12 semester credit hours in child development/early childhood education; OR				
(b) an associate level degree in child development/ early childhood education and 3 years experience in early childhood education.				
(3) ***School-based school-age care programs*** must comply with (1) or (2).				
b. **If the care and education program is operated by a school district or district foundation**, with the exception of school-age care, the teacher holds a valid Nebraska Teaching Certificate endorsed as follows:				
(1) ***In a program for children younger than kindergarten age***, the teacher has an endorsement in Early Childhood Education;				
(2) ***In a program serving preschool children with disabilities***, the teacher has an endorsement in Preschool Handicapped or Early Childhood Education;				
(3) ***In the kindergarten/primary level, or mixed-age grouping,*** the teacher has at least an endorsement in Elementary Education and 9 semester credit hours in child development/early childhood education.				

QUALITY INDICATORS	Met	In Process	Not Met	N/A
c. **In a private or nonpublic school-age care or preschool, or in a public school-based school-age care program**, the staff member responsible for supervising other staff (or the only staff member in a program operated by one person), has at least: (1) A bachelor level degree in early child development/ early childhood education; OR (2) A bachelor level degree in a related field, with at least one of the following: 12 semester credit hours in child development/early childhood education; OR (3) An associate level degree in a related field, with at least the following: 12 semester credit hours in child development/early childhood education and 1 year's experience in early childhood education.				
d. **In a child care center or preschool**, a staff member directly responsible for a group of children has at least: (1) A bachelor level degree in child development/early childhood education; OR (2) A bachelor level degree in elementary education with additional training and experience in early childhood education; OR (3) An associate level degree in child development/early childhood education;				
e. **In a family child care home**, any staff member not having the qualifications required for a child care center or preschool (d. above) has documentation of participation in at least 24 clock hours of inservice annually.				
f. Staff with no prior experience in programs enrolling children with disabilities agree, through a written plan developed at the time of employment, to obtain staff development/training specific to working with children with special needs.				
g. Staff with no prior experience in programs enrolling infants/ toddlers agree, through a written plan developed at the time of employement, to obtain staff development/training specific to working with children in this age range.				

QUALITY INDICATORS	Met	In Process	Not Met	N/A
h. Staff with no prior experience in school-age care agree, through a written plan developed at the time of employment, to obtain staff development/training specific to school-age care.		•		
i. Staff with no prior experience in working with parents agree, through a written plan developed at the time of employment, to obtain staff development/training specific to parent and family involvement/education and effective techniques for working with adults.				
STAFF RETENTION				
1. The program has a written plan to encourage staff members to remain with the program (e.g., staff appreciation/recognition, employee of the month, support for professional fees, release time to attend training opportunities).				
2. The program has a written plan for the upgrading of salaries and benefits which demonstrates an effort to improve equity of compensation among care and education professionals.				
STAFF DEVELOPMENT				
1. New staff members are oriented regarding the program's philosophy, goals, policies, emergency health and safety procedures, special needs of individual children assigned to the staff member's care, guidance and group management techniques, daily routines, and expectations for ethical conduct.				
2. The program has a written policy stating a commitment to a staff development program.				
3. In programs with more than one staff member, a committee representative of the staff is selected to assist in forming and implementing the staff development plan.				
4. The staff development committee conducts an annual needs assessment.				
5. The program documents the use of various formats for the staff development program (e.g., on-site training, visitations to other programs, conferences, encouragement of membership in and attendance at meetings of early childhood professional organizations, curriculum development projects).				

QUALITY INDICATORS	Met	In Process	Not Met	N/A
6. When possible, locally arranged inservice is shared with other programs and agencies within the community.				
7. The program provides access to a professional library for the staff.				
8. The program subscribes to and utilizes at least one professional journal in the field of early childhood care and education.				
9. Documentation of participation in staff development activities is kept on file.				

STAFF ASSIGNMENTS

1. The program maintains a sufficient staff/child ratio and limits total group size. The ratio is determined by the number and ages of the children and the nature of the physical setting of the program.

Age Range of Children	Number of Staff: Number of Children
6 weeks to 18 months	1 : 4
18 months to 3 years	1 : 6
3 years to 5 years	1 : 10
Kindergarten through third grade in schools approved by the Department of Education	1 : 18; OR 1 : 19-25 with a fulltime paraprofessional
School-age care in programs licensed by the Department of Social Services	1 : 15

2. The staffing plan indicates that each staff member or team has primary responsibility for an identified group of children to provide continuity and emotional attachment for all age groups of children.

3. The staffing plan provides for infants and toddlers to spend the majority of the time interacting with the same person each day.

4. Grouping of children age 3 years and above supports opportunities for interaction in mixed-age group settings.

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THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

IDEAL STATEMENT: A quality care and education program for children provides an environment which facilitates the optimal growth and development of children, with opportunities for appropriate learning experiences through active involvement with people and materials.

RATIONALE: Guided by shared goals, curriculum in care and education programs for children includes everything that happens in the program, the nature of the daily schedule, children's interactions with materials and people, the planned activities and transitions between them, and the routines of each day. The quality and arrangement of the physical space, equipment, and materials have a strong influence on the types of activities and interactions which are possible, as well as on the feelings of both children and staff. Since children learn by being active, a quality child-oriented program utilizes both planned and spontaneous activities to help children discover more about themselves and the world in which they live. The unique needs of school-age care require that it is not to become merely an extension of the school day with focus primarily on academics, but is a program which addresses all developmental areas and recognizes social skill development as a critical component.

Within the physical environment, quality interactions between the staff and the children and the promotion of harmonious relationships among the children are viewed as essential to achieving the program's goals. The enhancement of self-esteem in children is accomplished through the provision of optimally challenging learning opportunities. A quality care and education program for children recognizes that children learn to view themselves as industrious and competent when they are respected for their unique characteristics and have developmentally appropriate experiences available to them.

QUALITY INDICATORS	Met	In Process	Not Met	N/A
THE PHYSICAL SETTING				
1. The usable indoor activity space provides at least 35 square feet per child.				
2. The outdoor play space provides a minimum of 50 square feet per child and accommodates at least 25% of the children at one time.				
3. The space is arranged to provide optimum separation of quiet and noisy areas, but permits ongoing supervision by adults.				
4. The space is arranged to provide age appropriate activities for various types of learning experiences. Indoors and/or outdoors, these activities include but are not limited to: Blocks — Math materials Manipulative toys — Music Food/nutrition activities — Art Dramatic play — Spaces to be alone Language/books/listening/writing — Woodworking Science/nature/discovery/water/sand/sensory activities Large motor activities/wheel toys/climbers/swings/balls				

QUALITY INDICATORS	Met	In Process	Not Met	N/A
5. The space and its furnishing are arranged to facilitate a variety of large group, small group, and individual activities.				
6. For school-age children, a study area is available.				
7. Soft elements are included in the environment (e.g., cushions, rugs, carpeting indoors; sand, grass outdoors).				
8. Sound-absorbing materials are used to reduce excessive noise in the indoor environment (e.g., rugs under blocks, pads under pounding bench, acoustical materials on walls and ceilings, etc.).				
9. The surfaces under indoor and outdoor equipment from which children might fall are resilient (e.g., sand, pea gravel, dirt, grass, rubber matting).				
10. The indoor environment is colorful, with children's work and other materials safely displayed at child's eye level.				
11. The indoor and outdoor environments are clean, safe, and free from clutter.				
12. The space and materials are arranged to encourage children to make choices among available activities and materials.				
13. A variety of age appropriate equipment and materials is provided to fit the range of age, interests, abilities, special needs, and diversity among the children.				
14. Programs serving infants provide a safe area for play and exploration.				
15. Indoor and outdoor furniture and equipment are of the appropriate size, type, and durability to fit the ages, developmental levels, and special needs of the individuals who use it.				
16. Space is arranged to facilitate children's work on long-term projects, as well as individual and small group work on daily projects.				
17. Equipment and furnishings are refurbished or replaced as needed to maintain safety and add to the overall appearance of the environment.				
18. Individual spaces are provided for children's clothing and other personal belongings (e.g., bins, baskets, labeled hooks).				

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QUALITY INDICATORS	Met	In Process	Not Met	N/A
19. Adequate storage is available for materials and equipment.				
20. Equipment provided outdoors can be and is used without adult assistance, but with supervision.				
21. The outdoor environment provides a variety of surfaces (e.g., grass, concrete, sand).				
22. The outdoor environment is made attractive and inviting by capitalizing upon such natural features as trees, grass, and other plants.				
23. The bathrooms and drinking water are easily accessible to children and adults from both indoor and outdoor work/play areas.				
24. Toileting facilities are accessible, but separate from play areas. Children are allowed privacy as appropriate.				
25. If necessary, step stools are provided to make bathroom fixtures accessible to children and to encourage self-help.				
26. When the program includes napping and/or sleeping, children are provided a routine location for napping and/or sleeping each day on cots, mats or other soft sleeping surfaces which are clean, dry, and not in direct contact with the floor.				
27. Staff members are provided with private and secure areas for their personal belongings.				
28. When preschool and school-age children attend the program in the same facility, separate space is available to the school-age children at least a portion of the day.				
THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES				
1. The curriculum is child-centered, with consideration given for individual needs and interests of children when program goals are set.				
2. Opportunities to learn through play are an integral part of the daily curriculum.				
3. The philosophy of the program and its goals for children are reflected in activity plans and descriptions. Samples of plans are available for review.				

QUALITY INDICATORS	Met	In Process	Not Met	N/A
4. The posted daily schedule provides a balance of experiences including, but not limited to: a. indoor/outdoor activities b. quiet/active activities c. individual/small group/large group activities d. large muscle/small muscle activities e. child initiated/staff initiated activities				
5. The daily activity plans provide a variety of developmentally appropriate, concrete, hands-on learning experiences to: a. promote a healthy sense of competence b. develop social skills in each child c. encourage the child to think, reason, and pose questions d. foster both receptive and expressive language development e. enhance each child's physical development and skills f. encourage sound safety, health, and nutritional practices g. stimulate the child's creative expression and appreciation of the arts				
6. The available activities support learning through exploration, problem solving, repetition, intuition, imitation, etc.				
7. Opportunities are provided for children to learn through a variety of senses (e.g., sight, hearing, touching, smelling).				
8. Opportunities are provided for children to participate in activities which promote cooperation, rather than competition (e.g. long-term and short-term group projects, etc.).				
9. Transitions provide opportunities for learning and seldom require that all children move as a group from one activity to another.				
10. Time during the day is allowed for both child-selected activities and adult-directed activities. All children have opportunities to make choices; staff respect the child's right to choose not to participate in every activity.				
11. Developmentally appropriate self-help skills are taught and incorporated into the daily schedule.				
12. The daily routine is flexible and adapts to the individual needs and interests of each child.				
13. Activities are provided for children who do not require naps.				

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QUALITY INDICATORS	Met	In Process	Not Met	N/A
14. The staff is flexible in changing the schedule when adverse weather or other situations arise. Such changes in plans are carried out without alarming the children.				
15. Routine tasks are treated as opportunities to further children's learning (e.g., lunch or snack time is a period for encouraging language development, social interaction, appreciation of foods of various cultures, self-help skills, nutrition education).				
16. A wide variety of age appropriate, safe, durable learning materials and equipment is available. a. **For infants**, materials and equipment include but are not limited to: - toys that rattle, squeak, or make music - cuddly toys, teething toys, mobiles, unbreakable objects and pictures - infant seats, crawling area, furniture to pull self up b. **For toddlers**, materials and equipment include but are not limited to: - push and pull toys - stacking toys; large wooden spools/beads/cubes - durable picture books; music - pounding bench; simple puzzles - play telephone; dolls; pretend toys - large paper, crayons - furniture to hold onto while walking - sand and water toys c. **For preschool and kindergarten/primary children**, materials and equipment include but are not limited to: - active play equipment for climbing and balancing - sand and water toys - wheel toys - balls - unit blocks and accessories - manipulatives (puzzles, beads, pegs, games, design blocks, small building toys, etc.) - woodworking tools and materials - basic art materials (painting equipment and paper, collage materials, paste, glue, scissors, crayons, clay, dough, etc.) - science materials to increase observation and communication skills as well as provide opportunities for children to learn by exploring, discovering, and experimenting - dramatic play accessories and props (e.g., dolls, dress-up clothes, child-sized furniture, etc.)				

QUALITY INDICATORS	Met	In Process	Not Met	N/A
- cooking equipment - basic math materials and games to help children discover concepts by exploration and experimentation and problem-solving (e.g., objects for sorting, geoboards, Cuisenaire rods) - language/literacy development materials (e.g., picture and predictable books, records, games, classification lotto, flannel boards and materials, puppets, writing materials, age appropriate reading materials, etc.) - materials for music and creative movement (e.g., instruments, records, record player, tape recorder, dance props, etc.) d. **For school-age children**, materials and equipment include those listed for preschool and kindergarten/primary children (see 14.c above) and, in addition, might include: - materials for hobbies and crafts - board games - computers - equipment for organized games				
17. Learning materials are available in sufficient quantity so that: a. Materials are periodically changed to provide variety; and, b. Each child present can, at any given time, have a variety of choices to be individually involved.				
18. Materials are arranged in an accessible manner to provide a clear view of what is available, promote self-selection, and encourage investigation by children.				
19. Materials and equipment permit varied types of play/interaction. a. Duplicates of some toys are available to promote parallel play (e.g., two or more phones, two or more dolls, two or more trucks, etc.). b. Related materials are available to promote cooperative interactions and role play (e.g., grocery carts, purses, cash register, etc.). c. Unstructured materials (e.g., blocks, sand, water, finger-paint, clay, etc.) are available to promote creativity and/or representation.				

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QUALITY INDICATORS	Met	In Process	Not Met	N/A
d. Developmentally appropriate games in various formats (e.g., card, lotto, board, etc.) are available to acquaint children with the function of rules and cooperative interaction.				
20. Equipment and materials are available to promote both large and small muscle development.				
21. Children are given opportunities throughout the day for indoor and outdoor play.				
22. Learning activities, materials, and equipment positively reflect the diverse nature of American society with respect to race, culture, ethnicity, family structure, religion, age, gender, and physical and mental abilities.				
23. The program activities allow for and encourage involvement by parents/guardians and other members of the community as resource persons, assistants, etc.				
24. Appropriate field trips and outings near and away from the program site are utilized when possible to broaden the children's base of experience and knowledge.				
25. Children's physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development are monitored through the daily use of observation.				
26. Any formal assessment used to monitor children's progress is age appropriate and meets accepted standards of reliability and validity.				
27. The use of visual media, such as television, films, and videotapes, is limited to developmentally appropriate programming. An alternative activity is always available so that a child may choose not to view the program.				
THE INTERPERSONAL ENVIRONMENT				
1. The program is characterized by an overall climate of acceptance, caring, and trust.				
2. Groups are organized so that each child relates to the same staff member for a majority of the program day. Every effort is made to assure that secure, dependable relationships between children and staff are established and maintained.				

QUALITY INDICATORS	Met	In Process	Not Met	N/A
3. The staff displays attitudes and promotes activities which positively reflect the diverse nature of American society with respect to race, culture, ethnicity, family structure, religion, age, gender, and physical and mental abilities.				
4. At most times natural conversations, spontaneous laughter and exclamations of excitement among children and between children and staff characterize the sound of the environment. The environment is not characterized by either harsh, stressful noise or enforced quiet. Times when staff talk to the whole group are limited. Verbal interaction and discussion are encouraged.				
5. Staff model positive and culturally sensitive communication techniques (e.g., speaking at eye level, observing optimum proximity, using low and friendly voice tones).				
6. Expectations for children's behavior are appropriate to their current level of development.				
7. Staff address children in a direct, respectful manner, avoiding unfavorable comparisons, undertones of sarcasm, or intent to humiliate.				
8. Traits of independence, self-initiation, and responsibility are encouraged in developmentally appropriate ways, both through the organization of the physical environment and the routines established by the staff.				
9. Staff model and maintain age-appropriate expectations for children with regard to the development of positive traits of character (e.g., kindness, trust, honesty, non-violence, fairness, willingness to share, cooperation).				
10. Staff model problem-solving techniques in addressing group issues and encourage similar approaches by children in coping with their own problems.				
11. Adults comment on positive behavior and accomplishments by specific rather than generalized responses to give acknowledgement to the child which encourages self-motivation rather than motivation to please the adult (e.g., "Your house has a window in every wall!" rather than, "Nice house.")				
12. A child's periodic need to be away from the group is respected and allowed within appropriate supervision.				

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QUALITY INDICATORS	Met	In Process	Not Met	N/A
13. Staff actively initiate and respond to interaction with children.				
14. Staff provide effective supervision to ensure the safety of children, and respond to children in distress, whether it is physical or psychological.				
15. Staff use positive techniques of guidance with children. Time-out is used infrequently and only after other methods (e.g., redirection, positive reinforcement, encouragement, problem-solving, negotiating, planning ahead to prevent problems, etc.) have been demonstrated to be unsuccessful.				
16. Staff assist children in dealing with anger, sadness, and frustration through comforting them, helping them learn to identify and accept their feelings, and helping them develop effective ways to handle feelings.				
17. Staff recognize, encourage, and model prosocial behaviors such as cooperation, helping, taking turns, and talking to solve problems.				
18. Staff facilitate children's learning by emphasizing active learning experiences and child-initiated activities, rather than adult-directed activities.				
19. Staff provide opportunities for children to develop self-care skills, including health, safety, and appropriate leisure activities.				

HEALTH AND SAFETY

IDEAL STATEMENT: A quality care and education program for children establishes and maintains a safe and healthful environment for children, staff, and parents/guardians. Health and safety factors exceed the minimum standards of other regulating agencies.

RATIONALE: These quality indicators are intended to augment minimum standards currently applied to such programs by the Nebraska Departments of Social Services, Education, and Health, and the Fire Marshal's Office. In quality programs it is anticipated that efforts are made to assure that the setting and the practices of the staff foster optimum health and safety practices in all areas, including the prevention of illness and accidents, coping with emergencies, and the encouragement of positive practices.

QUALITY INDICATORS	Met	In Process	Not Met	N/A
1. All applicable minimum health and safety regulations are met on a continuing basis.				
2. In programs licensed by the Department of Social Services, parents/guardians are required to provide evidence that the child's immunization status is up to date according to standards adopted by the Department of Health. Records must be kept current to maintain child's enrollment in the program. Parents/guardians may request an exemption based on medical/ religious beliefs.				
3. School-based programs follow school health requirements.				
4. The program has a written policy, developed in consultation with a health professional, which delineates the conditions under which children are excluded from the program (e.g., communicable diseases, communicable skin diseases, fevers).				
5. One person qualified in child cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and first aid is immediately available for each 15 children at the program site and on field trips and outings.				
6. A qualified health professional has been identified and is available to the program to provide consultation on health related issues (e.g., Dept. of Health, Child Care Nurse Consultants, Ask-a-Nurse, local hospital, etc).				
7. When using vehicles other than regulation school buses, approved car seats are used when transporting children who are younger than four and weigh less than 40 pounds.				
8. Vehicles used to transport children are insured and well-maintained.				

QUALITY INDICATORS	Met	In Process	Not Met	N/A
9. A procedure is in place to provide for safe arrival and departure of all children in the program. The procedure encourages parent-staff interaction and allows the release of children only to authorized people.				
10. For school-age children, a procedure exists to ensure the safety of those whose parents/guardians have agreed to allow their children to leave the program on their own. The procedure includes written agreements between parents/guardians and the program and consistent sign-out procedures for those children.				
11. The program has a written procedure for monitoring admittance of visitors to the program site other than staff or legal guardians.				
12. The program has a written policy concerning the release of children which requires parents/guardians to provide a list of persons authorized to take any child from the program site. The policy includes a requirement that designated persons must provide identification before leaving the program site with the child. The policy includes a written plan of action in case an unauthorized person attempts to take the child from the site.				
13. Emergency fire and tornado drills are conducted once a month when the program is in session, at a variety of times so that all children and staff have experience with drills, and records of same are kept on file.				
14. In the absence of the 911 emergency system in a community, a plan is developed for contacting emergency services.				
15. Staff accompanying children on field trips or outings carry written emergency information and first-aid supplies.				
16. Staff participate in ongoing training in the practice and monitoring of appropriate hygiene, health, and safety procedures for themselves and children.				
17. The promotion of positive health, safety, and wellness practices for children, families, and staff is part of the curriculum.				

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT AND PARENTING EDUCATION

IDEAL STATEMENT: A quality care and education program for children recognizes the value of family involvement through the promotion of positive interaction with parents and the provision of a family support and parent education program.

RATIONALE: The most important influences on children are their families and their home environments. Therefore, parent and family involvement is an integral part of the quality care and education program for children. Parental involvement improves the program for the child, benefits the staff and program, and enhances parenting skills. Today's families are very diversified. Each family has primary responsibility for its own children. The family involvement/parenting education program must be based on an acceptance of diversity among families, including an awareness of differing values, structures, needs, and aspirations. Quality programs recognize that parenting is a developmental process which may be enhanced through the provision of support and information.

QUALITY INDICATORS	Met	In Process	Not Met	N/A
1. A comprehensive handbook which includes information about the program philosophy, policies, and procedures is provided to each family.				
2. Parents/guardians are provided an orientation to the program.				
3. Communications with families occur on a regular basis through notes, newsletters, parent-information boards, individual contact, parent conferences, and/or home visits.				
4. The program provides regular avenues for input from parents/guardians (e.g., parent advisory committees, orientation sessions, coffees, needs assessments, personal or telephone consultations).				
5. Family members are encouraged to visit the program, to volunteer in the program, and to make suggestions.				
6. A staff member is accessible to family members throughout the hours of operation.				
7. Parents/guardians have access to their children throughout all hours of operation.				
8. Information of interest to families is shared on an ongoing basis (e.g., brochures, seminars, parent education programs, immunization information, etc.).				
9. The program provides resources to families whose children are in transition to another program or level within the program.				
10. Staff training includes information on family systems and methods for effective interactions and relationships with parents/guardians.				

QUALITY INDICATORS	Met	In Process	Not Met	N/A
11. A verbal and/or written system is established for sharing day-to-day happenings that may affect children. The nature of information given about individual children is primarily positive.				

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USE OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES

IDEAL STATEMENT: A quality care and education program for children integrates community resources to enhance the program.

RATIONALE: Children in care and education programs present diverse backgrounds and developmental levels; therefore, programs must provide services and resources to address a diversity of needs. Communities offer additional resources to support children and their families. The utilization of these resources promotes community collaboration, more comprehensive services for children and families, and support for early childhood care and education programs.

QUALITY INDICATORS	Met	In Process	Not Met	N/A
1. Community resources not available within the program are arranged on a consultative basis (e.g., programs provided by community agencies, services of health professionals, psychological services, fine arts and recreational programs, support services).				
2. Procedures for utilization of professionals beyond the program are defined and include verification of need and assurance of confidentiality.				
3. Information about available community resources (e.g., mental health clinics, state agencies, service clubs, and volunteer agencies) is shared with staff and families.				
4. Volunteers from the community are invited to participate in the program.				
5. Orientation, training, and a handbook are available to volunteers who participate on a regular basis.				

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EVALUATION OF PROGRAM AND STAFF

IDEAL STATEMENT: A quality care and education program for children conducts regular and systematic evaluation of the program and staff to assure that the philosophy and goals of the program are being fulfilled.

RATIONALE: Regular and systematic evaluation is an important aspect of a quality care and education program for children. It is essential that evaluation is done on a regular basis to maintain the vitality of the program and to assure that it is being conducted in the best interests of the children and families being served. Evaluation that includes informal and formal activities provides a mechanism for feedback through suggestions that will enhance both the competency of the staff and the effectiveness of the program. Evaluation that combines self-study and outside appraisal is more comprehensive and meaningful when relevant individuals are involved, contributing to awareness of strengths and weaknesses.

QUALITY INDICATORS	Met	In Process	Not Met	N/A
PROGRAM EVALUATION				
1. Annual review of the program is completed by a team which represents administration, parents/guardians, and staff.				
2. A parent survey to identify parent understanding and satisfaction with the program is part of the annual review process.				
3. The annual program review leads to staff involvement in the development of written goals and activities which foster program improvement.				
4. A formal evaluation of all components of the program is conducted at least every three years.				
5. A written report of the formal evaluation includes strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations and is provided to parents and staff for their review.				

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QUALITY INDICATORS	Met	In Process	Not Met	N/A
STAFF EVALUATION *(This section is applicable to programs with more than one staff member.)* 1. The program administrator conducts at least an annual formal evaluation of all personnel, provides written and oral comments and suggestions to the employee, and maintains a report of the evaluation in the personnel file.				
2. All personnel are informed of the procedures and forms for written evaluation. For those who work directly with children, the evaluation includes, but is not limited to the following: a. knowledge of principles of child development b. communication skills with children, staff, and parents c. evidence of professional improvement d. planning, preparation, and use of appropriate techniques and materials e. use of good judgment and adequate record keeping f. employment of sound ethical practices				
3. All personnel are informed of areas for improvement through identification of specific goals, including a time line for improvement and regular review of progress toward improvement.				
4. A probationary period, including a formal evaluation, is specified for new employees.				

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